

Week 3

Christ, From Whom All Blessings Flow

Devotion by Jeffrey Hiatt



CELEBRATING

Charles Wesley

300 YEARS

1707-2007

CHRIST, FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW

Words: Charles Wesley, 1740 (1 Cor. 12:4-31; Gal. 3:27-28)

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
perfecting the saints below,
hear us, who thy nature share,
who thy mystic body are.

Join us, in one spirit join,
let us still receive of thine;
still for more on thee we call,
thou who fillest all in all.

Closer knit to thee, our Head,
Nourish us, O Christ, and feed!
Let us daily growth receive,
More and more in Jesus live.

Jesus, we thy members are,
Cherish us with kindest care,
Of thy flesh and of thy bone,
Love, for ever love thine own!

Move and actuate and guide,
diverse gifts to each divide;
placed according to thy will,
let us all our work fulfill;

Never from thy service move,
needful to each other prove;
use the grace on each bestowed,
tempered by the art of God.

Sweetly may we all agree,
Touched with softest sympathy;
Kindly for each other care;
Every member feel its share.

Wounded by the grief of one,
Now let all the members groan;
Honored if one member is,
All partake the common bliss.

Many are we now, and one,
we who Jesus have put on;
there is neither bond nor free,
male nor female, Lord, in thee.

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
rendered all distinctions void;
names and sects and parties fall;
thou, O Christ, art all in all!

Week 3, Day One

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Jesus provides us with the connection with the Almighty God. No other avenue could reveal more about God than the Divine Son. The Father has put into the hands of the Son the task of blessing humanity. The One who has suffered innocently all the worst ravages spirit and body could endure. Yet, with great mercy and even more love, Jesus opens his heart to take on all our sin. Then, in those precious healing hands, he transforms the distorted, broken pieces into something of perfection. What else would you expect from God? Since we are partakers of His nature, and are designated the mystic body of Christ, the Holy Spirit is at work within, with, and through us. Easter light, resurrection power, cascades over us. He found us, loved us, and now polishes away every blemish that cannot stand heaven's scrutiny.

This all sounds high and holy—and it is—but what does it mean for me today? How do I live it, when I don't look or feel very perfect? God's job is the perfecting, not yours or mine. Our work, words, attitudes are employed in praying, visiting, teaching, smiling, listening, being—fulfilling the place in the body of Christ that you are. You don't have to feel saintly to be a saint. By the way, what does a saint feel or look like anyway? From time to time, take a peek in Jesus' mirror and see if you can see what God sees.

*Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are.*

Prayer:

God of all grace and glory, who to us love and mercy show, make out of us kindred here below. Aid our prayers in their heavenly flight to find their destination aright. Leave your mark upon our soul, casting out sin, every whit made whole. Perfected by Heaven's own Son, our earthbound journey set to run. Blessings upon us bestowed conferred on another to show, Christ from whom all blessings flow!

Week 3, Day Two

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In Jesus, we are only able to celebrate genuine unity without division. It is not within us to stand aside and put others first. We are not likely to put ourselves out for the slightest inconvenience. Yet, the only way to be filled with Christ (Jesus-centered) is to be empty of ourselves (self-centered) and open to others.

Divine food, community shared is what nourishes us, causes us to grow. As we take on the characteristics, the virtues, we notice in Him, do we live. Easter power makes this possible. Holy Spirit life transformation is what washes away our grievances against others who have wronged us. Anger, bitterness withers in the sunlight of His love. His marvelous furnace takes the debris clogging my soul and turns it to ashes that I wear as a sign of forgiveness, both mine and his/hers.

Unity does not happen until wounded parties surrender their hurts, and the right to retribution, to the healing work of the Great Physician. Salvation is healing, but all of its aspects that are potentially present in the first move and mark of forgiveness have not been fully appropriated by all affected by the disturbance of shalom (peace).

If you want the light of Christ to dawn upon you and your situation this season, open your chest of hurts and let God rummage through its contents and be willing to let him buy all the old junk He wants. You don't really need those grudges, curses, and grievances anyway. They are lead weights, and heavy iron chains, maxed out credit cards that you can't pay. He wipes all that stuff out. He opens the window to Spring and clears the stale and stagnant air locked away in the old trunk.

Join us, in one spirit join,

Let us still receive of thine;

Still for more on thee we call,

Thou who fillest all in all.

Closer knit to thee, our Head;

Nourish us, O Christ, and feed!

Let us daily growth receive,

More and more in Jesus live.

Prayer:

Breath of God, I have been suffocating in the airtight panic room of my own sinful attitudes. Forgive me. Help me also to forgive others in resurrection light that gives me hope and new life. Make us one, Lord, living up to our baptism, and feast of the Bread of Life. May we smell like the sweet fragrances of Spring after the rain of repentance and forgiveness. Amen.

Week 3, Day Three

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For many of us in the Wesleyan tradition, the Wesley hymns are a source of theology, comfort, instruction for devotion, spiritual life, and practical Christian lifestyle. In these verses below, it is Jesus' love for us that takes center stage. Most of us non-Catholics, have little trouble of spiritualizing the words:

*Jesus, we thy members are,
Cherish us with kindest care,
Of thy flesh and of thy bone,
Love, for ever love thine own!*

*Move and actuate and guide,
Diverse gifts to each divide;
Placed according to thy will,
Let us all our work fulfill;*

*Never from our office move,
Needful to each other prove;
Use the grace on each bestowed,
Tempered by the art of God.*

What gives us the most trouble is the "flesh and bone" connection as visible spirituality. Somehow we identify all too well with:

*To live above with the saints we love,
O, that will be glory.*

BUT,

*To live below with the saints we know,
Well, that's another story!*

God in Christ has provided for a different experience! Who can hear it? Who can bear it? Will you live into that reality with me? The creative art of God is at work in each of us, all of us, to provide a "lilt of Irish laughter" in our journey. The gifts and grace to process orders, answer the phone, correct computer problems, make difficult employment decisions, the list goes on to include you. Here hard life meets God's sustaining work to fill lives with meaning and purpose in the swirl of seemingly meaningless minutia vying for attention. We are reminded of the Easter reality that the true focus is on Him, with the expression of our devotion showered on "the least of these" among us, the invisible, marginal worker next to us. This is guided by the hand of God, moved to have compassion on another. It is the fulfillment of your real work.

Prayer:

Christ of the Resurrection, by your own compassion on us, you endured the suffering of the dark night that led to the morning light, light of eternal love. Help us to live it, and love on each other just like you as the trinity love on each other. Amen.

Week 3, Day Four

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*Christ from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are*

*Join us, in one spirit join,
Let us still receive of thine;
Still for more on thee we call,
Thou who fillest all in all.*

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Diverse gifts to each divide;
Placed according to thy will,
Let us all our work fulfill;*

*Never form thy service move,
Needful to each other prove;
Use the grace on each bestowed,
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*Many are we now, and one,
We who Jesus have put on;
There is neither bond nor free,
Male or female, Lord in thee.*

*Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names and sects and parties fall;
Thou, O Christ, art all in all!
—Charles Wesley*

Where did this hymn come from? Although its origins are lost to all but the Author and his Master, its ingredients began being mixed in a kitchen.

Susanna Wesley's Kitchen
*You'll never be satisfied,
Where your heart does not abide.
Where is your heart? Where is your
treasure?*

Jesus told us to put our treasure in a safe place, a location where moths don't eat it, and robbers can't steal it.

Reminder: where our treasure is, there our heart is, too.

Remember: Easter's treasure lay in an British kitchen some three centuries ago. Have you ever traveled to that cozy nook of nourishment of Wesley history—the Epworth rectory kitchen? It is a place where more than a couple of little boys tasted the meaning of the sacraments. They smelled the power of fresh bread to attract the attention of the hungry. In that sanctuary, they imbibed the richness of the sacred drink—poured by a steady hand—that quenches the thirst of an eternal soul.

The matriarch of Methodism could also carry a tune. Although there is no evidence that she “whistled while she worked,” the hymns of the church echoed in the chapel of her heart and filled the home like a concert hall.

(Where do you think Charles learned to sing?)

Susanna's baking, singing, praying, teaching, loving, nurturing and preserving, gently tended the embers of a holy flame that would blaze differently than the fire in 1709 that nearly put out the coming Methodist inferno. Jesus buried the treasure of heaven in the heart of a noble, plain woman. In the struggles of the heat and pressure produced under parish kitchen conditions, resurrection truth burst forth from the oven in the lives of her children, as an uncontrollable conflagration! Everywhere that a heart lights another with devotion and loyalty to Christ is a witness of the sweeping wind and fire of God still moving and producing more treasure.

Jesus' type “treasure in heaven” is stored there only through earthly deposits. The Easter empowered gospel encounters the darkness and dangers of the road, but is willing to prepare one meal at a time, one day at a time, to sustain its weary travelers.

Look at your own “kitchen.” Where is your heart? What do others find there, the bread, the song, the treasure of heaven and earth?

Prayer

Lord of Love, bake heaven's bread and sing heaven's songs in our home kitchens. Tend the treasure of eternity in our hearts that we might invest it liberally in those whom you send our way. The real heat is not in spices, but in the love that produces it. Make us examples of that kind of invigorated love. Help us feed each other from your hand and side, then we, too, will be satisfied for our heart will have an abiding place in You. Amen.

Week 3, Day Five

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What defines Christians, it is said, is not nearly as much as how they live, as it is, by how they die. Of course, that is not entirely true. It is quite important how Christians live. In fact, usually how you live affects greatly the attitude you have toward death. John and Charles Wesley, aboard the Simmonds on their way to America as missionaries, encountered violent sea storms and they were terrified. The Moravian missionaries in the same vessel, in stark contrast, calmly sang hymns and prayed.

During this whole episode of their lives, John and Charles met with difficulties and personal disappointments and shame. These wounds of fame and pride, instead of being demons, do the work of angels, because they become turning points for their spiritual and missional healing. Charles and John never lose their distinctive personalities, but they are transformed in the crucible of suffering to feel deeply the pain and grief of those under their care.

John's preaching and Charles' hymns exude the sympathy and love that:
employs a thousand tongues in praise,
hears the music that brings life and health and peace,
feels the presence of the name that calms our fears,
bids our sorrows cease,
speaks and brings new life to the dead
sets prisoners free,
clothes the naked,
feeds the hungry,
brings healing to the nations,
And restores all things.

Easter has declared "null and void" the victory of the grave.
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice; the humble poor believe.
Made like Him—we rise! Alleluia!

*Wounded by the grief of one,
Now let all the members groan;
Honoured if one member is,
All partake the common bliss.*

*Sweetly may we all agree,
Touched with loving sympathy,
Kindly for each other care;
Every member feel its share.*

Prayer

Lord, we sing with full and grateful hearts of your magnificence. Help us to get a foretaste of Easter realities and feel them to the depths of our hearts. At our decision and motivational levels of life that affect our daily walk, help us apply all these things to live abundantly in resurrection light! Amen.

Week 3, Day Six

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Who can fathom the love of God? Who can hear the colors of its warmth? Or feel its delicious aromas? Or taste its beauty? Or see its richest sounds?

The senses are not confused, but they are reoriented to a new order of love. The love of God challenges us with a new worldview. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” True love of God fills the whole heart. What affections are left empty? The entire capacity of your life and its possibilities are saturated with it. Rejoice in God your Savior and delight in the Lord. His love excludes sin, fear. His love pushes out the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life.

God’s love makes us one. Selfish ambitions, desire for the trinkets of the world, fall with only a determination to treat the children of earth with kindness, respect and honor due those created in God’s image—all humanity!

Easter clarified the grave, death, and the devil. Their distortions of real life are destroyed. Jesus accomplished His mission. Now, until the final trumpet resounds, the rest of the Easter mission is up to us and the Holy Spirit, as it seems good. It’s harvest time this Spring! Keep those “tending the garden” gloves nearby, God’s going to use your hands and knees for the remaining work.

*Many are we now, and one,
We who Jesus have put on;
There is neither bond nor free,
Male or female, Lord in thee.*

*Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names and sects and parties fall;
Thou, O Christ, art all in all!*

Prayer

Lord, let no creature arise to replace you in my life. Stand guard of my heart and protect me against wandering affections. In open love to you, I find my security of loving others freely as I should without mixture of any other measure. You, Lord, are the one alone that we seek. May the reality of Easter produce the bouquet of love in our lives so that others may reap the benefits. Amen.